

Testimony Before
The Subcommittee on Contracting & Technology
Of the Small Business Committee
*“Ensuring Continuity of Care for Veteran Amputees:
The Role of Small Prosthetic Practices.”*
By
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Amputee as a Result of Wounds Sustained in Combat
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Chairman Braley, Thank you for the opportunity to sit before this subcommittee and share my experiences. The collective public service of the members in front of me is humbling and I'm truly honored to be here today. I served as a US Army Ranger in both Iraq and Afghanistan and lost my right leg as a result of wounds sustained in combat. I'm medically retired from the Army. Professionally, I'm an Investment Banker in Alabama and serve as an Area Outreach Coordinator for the Wounded Warrior Project.

I'd like to share with you my experience in transitioning from the battlefield to the civilian world. I'm a graduate of the United States Military Academy and served four years on active duty as an infantry officer in the United States Army. I deployed three times: Iraq in 2003 with the 82nd Airborne Division, and with 3rd Ranger Battalion to Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2005. I received three purple hearts, all from Improvised Explosive Devices in Iraq. My third injury destroyed most of my right foot.

I underwent a total of 13 reconstructive surgeries before my leg was amputated below the knee. Shortly after the amputation, I chose to pursue a medical retirement.

My experience is somewhat unique. I did not have my amputation at Walter Reed and have always relied on private providers for my prosthetics. The VA system has been very beneficial to me for three reasons: (1) The VA has paid for the absolute best prosthetics available, (2) Mr. Fred Down's office holds regular open forums to discuss prosthetic care, and (3) most importantly I've established a strong relationship with a provider who lives in my community.

I'd like to focus on the relationship I've established with my provider. Glenn Crumpton of Alabama Artificial Limb and Orthopedic Services has been a lifeline for me and my family. He's board certified and his family has been making legs for veterans from every conflict since WWII. Just as important, before the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan started, Glenn had years of experience making legs for not only veterans, but for other active

amputees who wanted to run, bike swim, sky dive, and ski in the best available equipment. Glenn's shop has a wealth of trade knowledge in crafting custom fit prosthetics for active amputees. He has an unparalleled conviction to learn and grow with his patients and carries a heavy burden: if the leg isn't right, the patient's life isn't right. Last month, I met Glenn twice at 6:30 AM, before work, to work on my new running leg. Just last week I broke my main foot. Glenn and I checked our schedules, by chance we were both in Birmingham on separate business and so he had a new foot delivered to his hotel. After my engagements were finished, we met and 100 miles from his shop and my office, I had a new foot. Much of our work has been on weekends, evenings, and early mornings. He provides that same level of care to all his patients.

And how did I find Glenn? It was good luck. Glenn doesn't have a contract with the VA. Had I not been resourceful and determined, we might have never met. And considering the stresses of such a traumatic, life changing injury, I was very

fortunate to have been able to research the best provider. The VA in my area uses a national company to contract prosthetic care. I've met and vetted their local associates, many of whom come and go as they're promoted or laterally transferred to other shops across the country. The benefits of the relationship Glenn and I have established can easily be transferred to other veterans if they know he's there and they know his capabilities. Our local VA uses Glenn's services for many other patients, but the national company holds the contract. In the VA amputee clinics, Glenn has been allowed to attend with his current patients, but any new patients that walk through the door are automatically handed to the national company. Of course, veterans are allowed to seek their own providers, but that investigation process could be very difficult.

For me, VA at the national level has been instrumental in helping me learn about ways to navigate the prosthetic system, mostly through Mr. Down's forums. I've been able to attend one forum in person and have been able to participate in many others through electronic communication. From the Veteran's

perspective, the forums provide a flow of information about the capabilities of some of the top notch VA campuses and they provide a means for veterans to provide feedback and for the VA to address issues. These forums are more than a coffee social and I am thankful for the staff that makes them possible.

On a final note, the VA has approved and paid for the best available prosthetic care. My recommendation to this committee would be to support any initiative that would better enable veterans like myself to connect with the numerous outstanding private providers across the country. The current system does facilitate the relationship Glenn and I have developed, but only after I sought something better. I never knew that the experience and craftsmanship I needed to achieve my goals was in my own home town.